

## **CRYPTORCHIDISM:** **A delayed descension**



**Overview—“I don’t understand what cryptorchidism is; please help me understand the condition and the treatment.”**

A dog or cat (or horse or human or many other mammal) is said to be cryptorchid when a normally expected scrotal testicle has not arrived in a timely manner. If the two testicles have not naturally descended into the scrotum by two months of age, it is unlikely that they will do so and the term cryptorchid is used. Dogs and cats can have one or both testicles undescended. During fetal development in the uterus, the testicles originate up near the kidneys and slowly descend along a predestined path into the groin (i.e. inguinal region), and then from inside-to-outside through the inguinal rings before they drop into the scrotum to stay. A delay or disruption in that normal travel schedule can happen at any point along the line, leaving the testicle in the abdomen, the ring or just under the skin in the groin.

Castrating an undescended testicle involves finding it first. This may be easily achieved with just exam palpation of the skin in the groin. It may be more involved with an ultrasound study of the abdomen. Or it can be achieved with a relatively common abdominal exploratory to identify and remove the testicle in one step.

**“Why is this procedure being recommended for my pet?”**

Data has shown that an undescended, cryptorchid testicle is at higher risk of two different testicular tumors; and large testicular tumors in the abdomen are at increased risk of twisting on their cord causing severe abdominal pain and requiring emergency surgery. Castration, in an elective setting before problems arise, is the treatment of choice for a cryptorchidism in dogs and cats.

**“What options do I have to treat my pet’s condition?”**

No treatment is an option for cryptorchidism. Even if only one testicle descends and is castrated, the remaining cryptorchid testicle will continue to produce testosterone (with associated pet male behaviors) and sperm (with associated risk of unintended pregnancy with mating).

Ultrasound can be used to specifically identify location of an undescended testicle in advance of surgery. Or surgery exploratory can be used to both identify and remove the testicle.

**“What postoperative complications do I need to know and understand when considering this surgery?”**

Exploring for and removing an abdominal testicle involves an incision in the abdomen next to the prepuce, and often may also include a small incision near the scrotum. Minor incisional inflammation and bruising can be expected.

It is possible, but extremely rare for a testicle to be non-existent. More commonly the cryptorchid testicle is so underdeveloped as to be unrecognizable. In these circumstances, the suspicious tissues are removed and submitted for microscopic analysis to confirm full removal of testicular tissues.

**“Are there situations when the surgical outcome is not what we hoped it would be?”**

Failure to identify a cryptorchid testicle is a very rare and undesirable outcome that may require additional diagnostic testing or surgery to resolve.

**“How is my pet’s life and lifestyle likely to change after this procedure?”**

After successful removal of two testicles, there are no restrictions after the recovery period.

**“Are there things I can do to prepare myself, my home and/or my pet for this procedure?”**

No special preparations are required. It is routinely recommended to prepare for a 2-4 week period of restricted activities for your pet.

**Outpatient surgery and anesthesia** can be uncomfortable, painful, disorienting, and frustrating experiences for animals; watching your pet work through the early postoperative period and recover from anesthesia and pain medications can be worrisome, scary and frustrating for pet owners. The vast majority of the time this period of difficulty is brief, and *your pet is actually more comfortable and secure at home with you*. Sometimes it doesn't feel like that at two in the morning when your pet is anxious and not consolable, and you are unsure of what to do. You always have the option of transporting your pet to a 24-hour veterinary facility postoperatively. If you do not want to have your pet home in the first few days postoperatively, please advise your primary care veterinary staff. They will provide contact information for a local 24-hour veterinary facility and help get an estimate for the ongoing care.

It is important that you have proper expectations about this procedure; your experience and your pet's outcome will benefit greatly. Please discuss this information with your veterinarian when working through the decision-making process regarding **cryptorchism** and castration

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